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WAR!

PART 1 OF 2

**ULTIMATE
WAR
PRELUDE**



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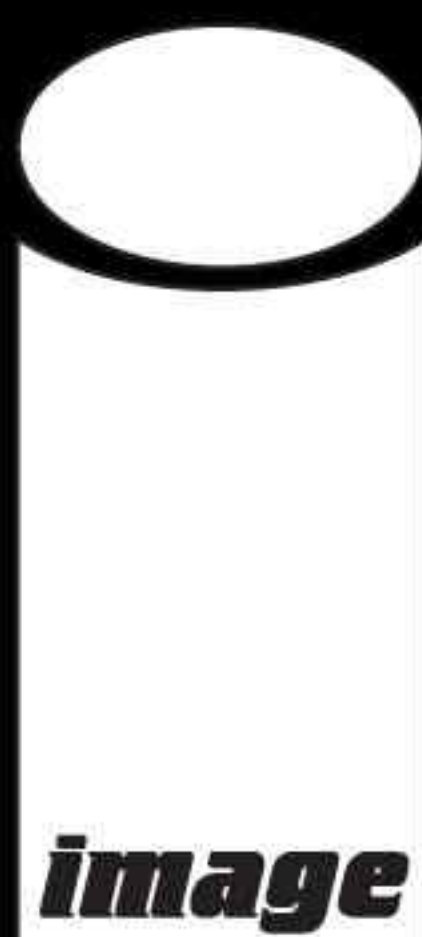


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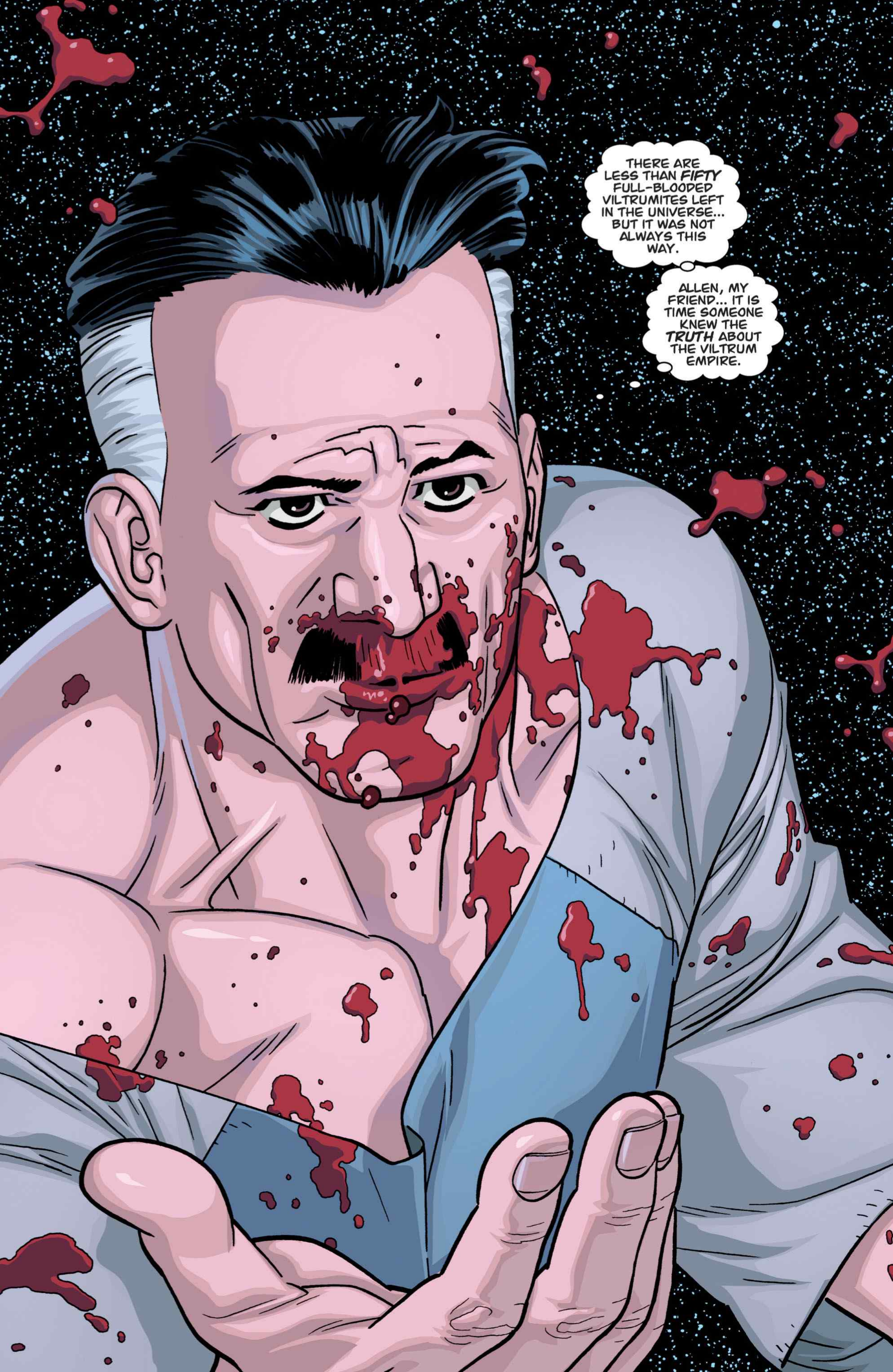
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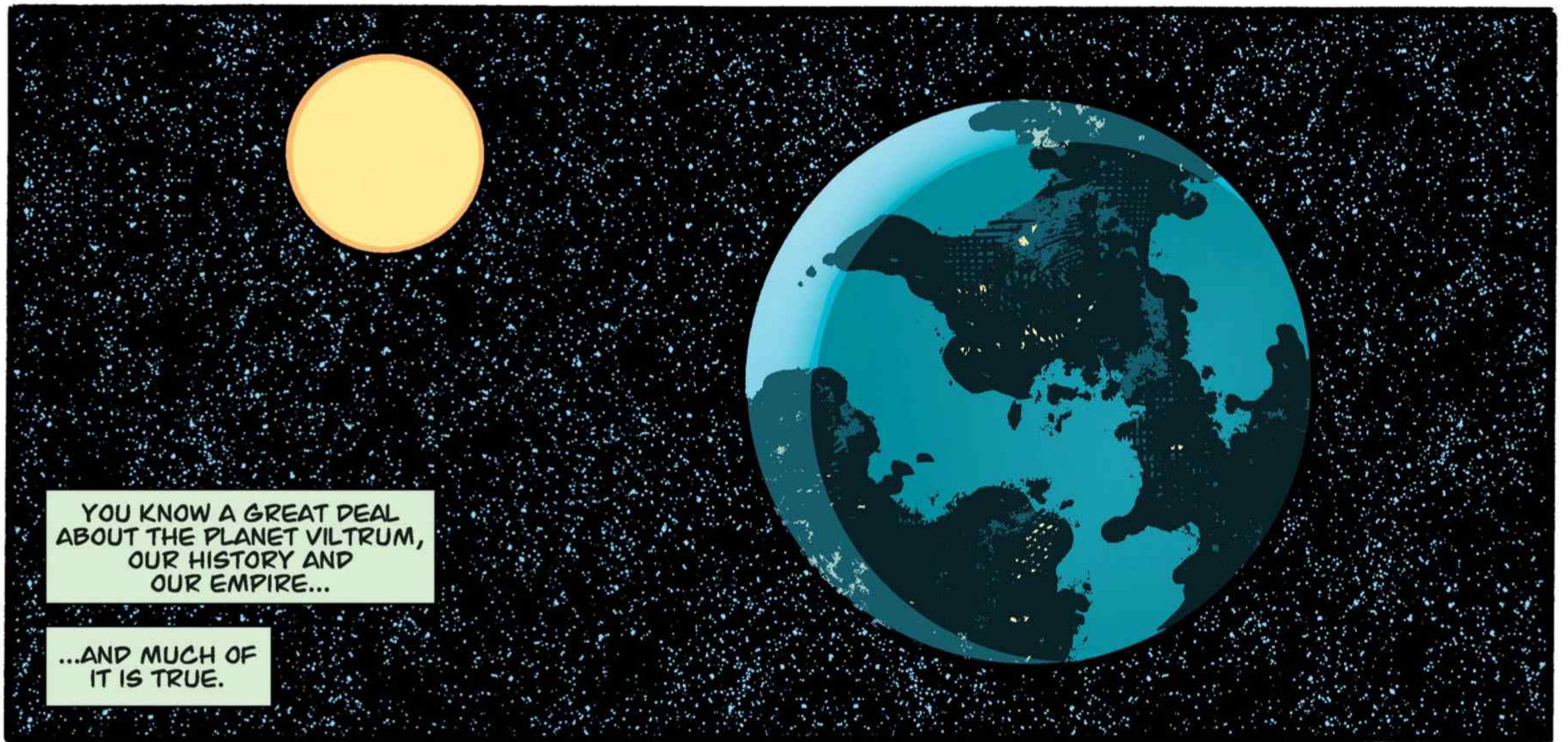
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THERE ARE
LESS THAN FIFTY
FULL-BLOODED
VILTRUMITES LEFT
IN THE UNIVERSE...
BUT IT WAS NOT
ALWAYS THIS
WAY.

ALLEN, MY
FRIEND... IT IS
TIME SOMEONE
KNEW THE
TRUTH ABOUT
THE VILTRUM
EMPIRE.



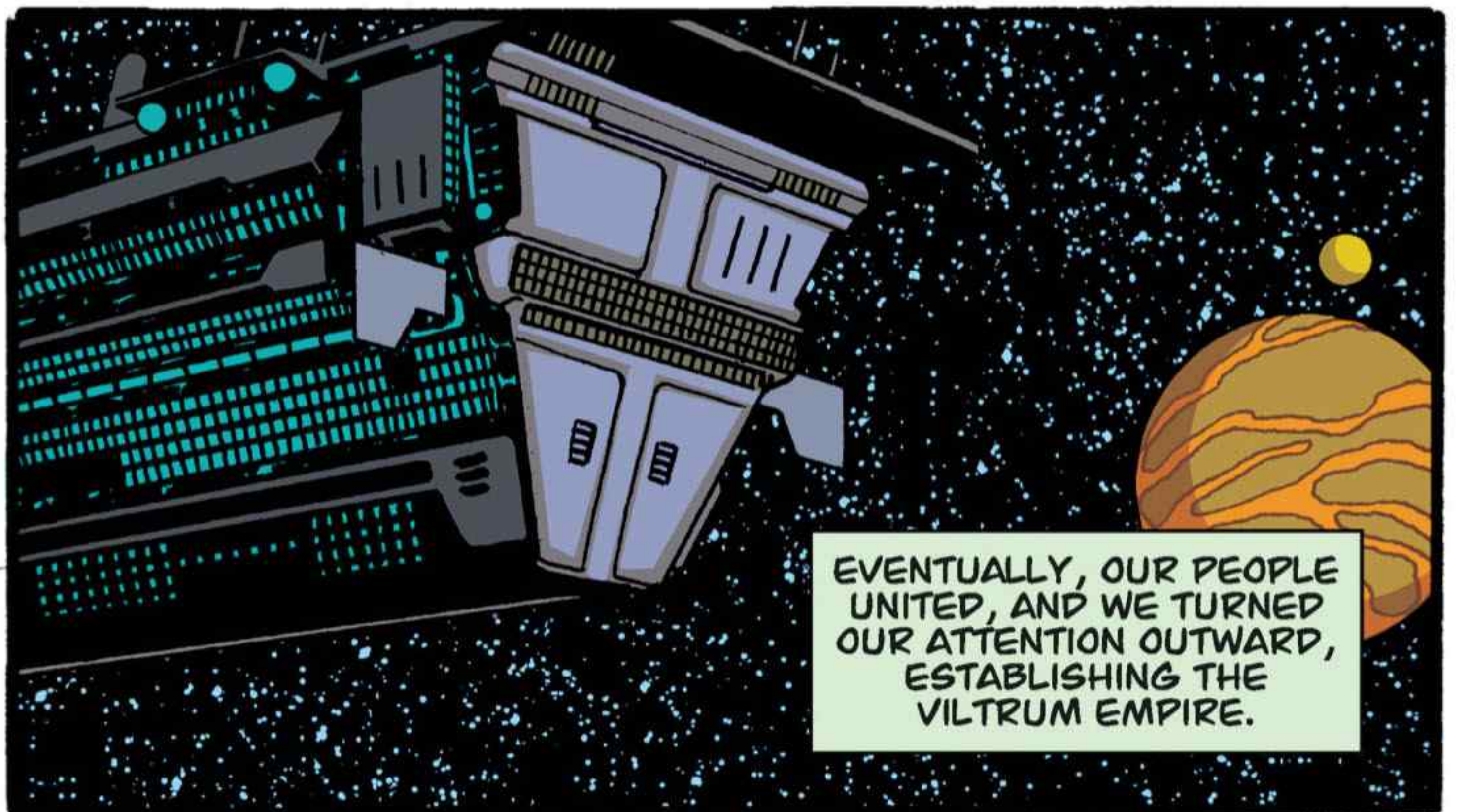
YOU KNOW A GREAT DEAL
ABOUT THE PLANET VILTRUM,
OUR HISTORY AND
OUR EMPIRE...

...AND MUCH OF
IT IS TRUE.



WE WERE A VIOLENT RACE
WHO VALUED STRENGTH
ABOVE ALL ELSE.

TO RID OURSELVES OF
ANY WEAKNESS WE
SLAUGHTERED EACH
OTHER UNTIL WE WERE
BRED INTO THE
VILTRUMITES YOU
KNOW TODAY.



EVENTUALLY, OUR PEOPLE
UNITED, AND WE TURNED
OUR ATTENTION OUTWARD,
ESTABLISHING THE
VILTRUM EMPIRE.



AN EMPIRE THAT CONTINUED
TO EXPAND AT AN ASTOUNDING
RATE FOR NEARLY
ONE-THOUSAND YEARS.



UNTIL OUR
ENEMIES MADE
A WEAPON
CAPABLE OF
HURTING US.

THEY MADE
A VIRUS.



UNIQUE TO OUR GENETIC CODE, THE VIRUS WAS DEVASTATING. IT SWEEPED THROUGH MY PEOPLE AT AN ALARMING RATE.

IT APPEARED THERE WAS NO WAY OF STOPPING IT. OUR ENTIRE EMPIRE WAS IN JEOPARDY.



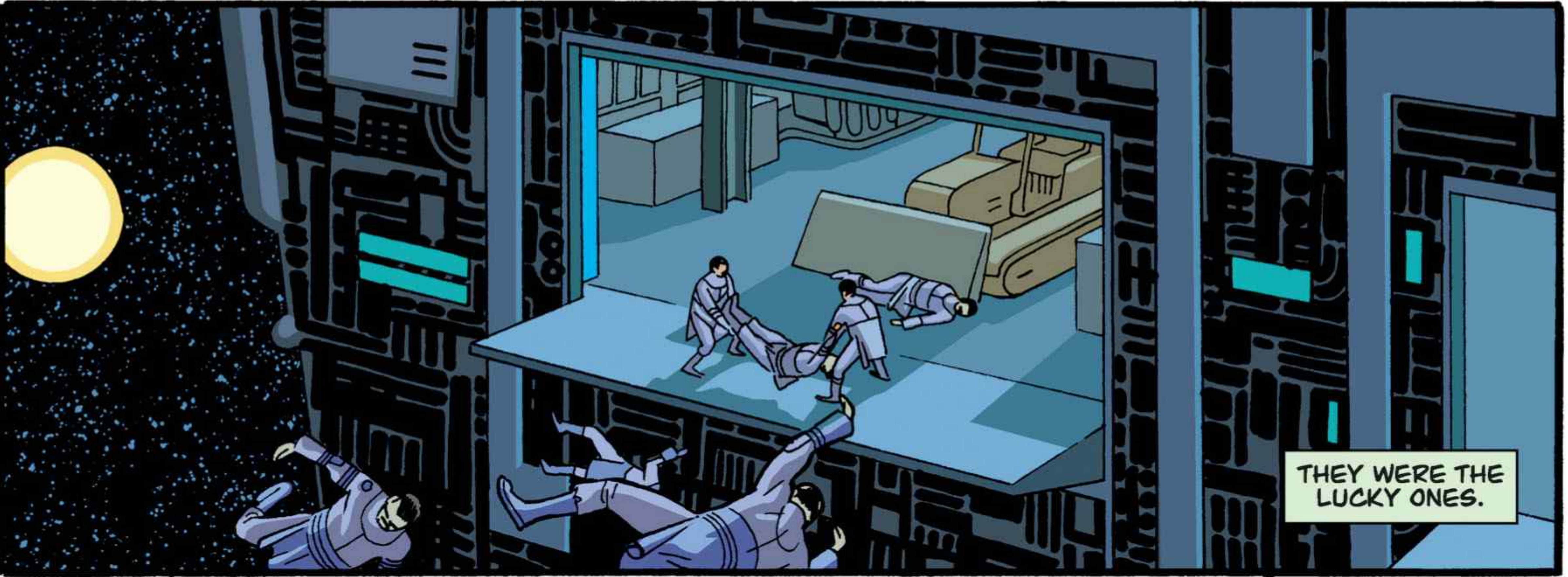
ATTEMPTS WERE MADE TO QUARANTINE THOSE WHO BECAME INFECTED... BUT IT WAS TOO LATE.

ALMOST THE ENTIRE POPULATION WAS INFECTED WITH WHAT WOULD BECOME KNOWN AS THE SCOURGE VIRUS.

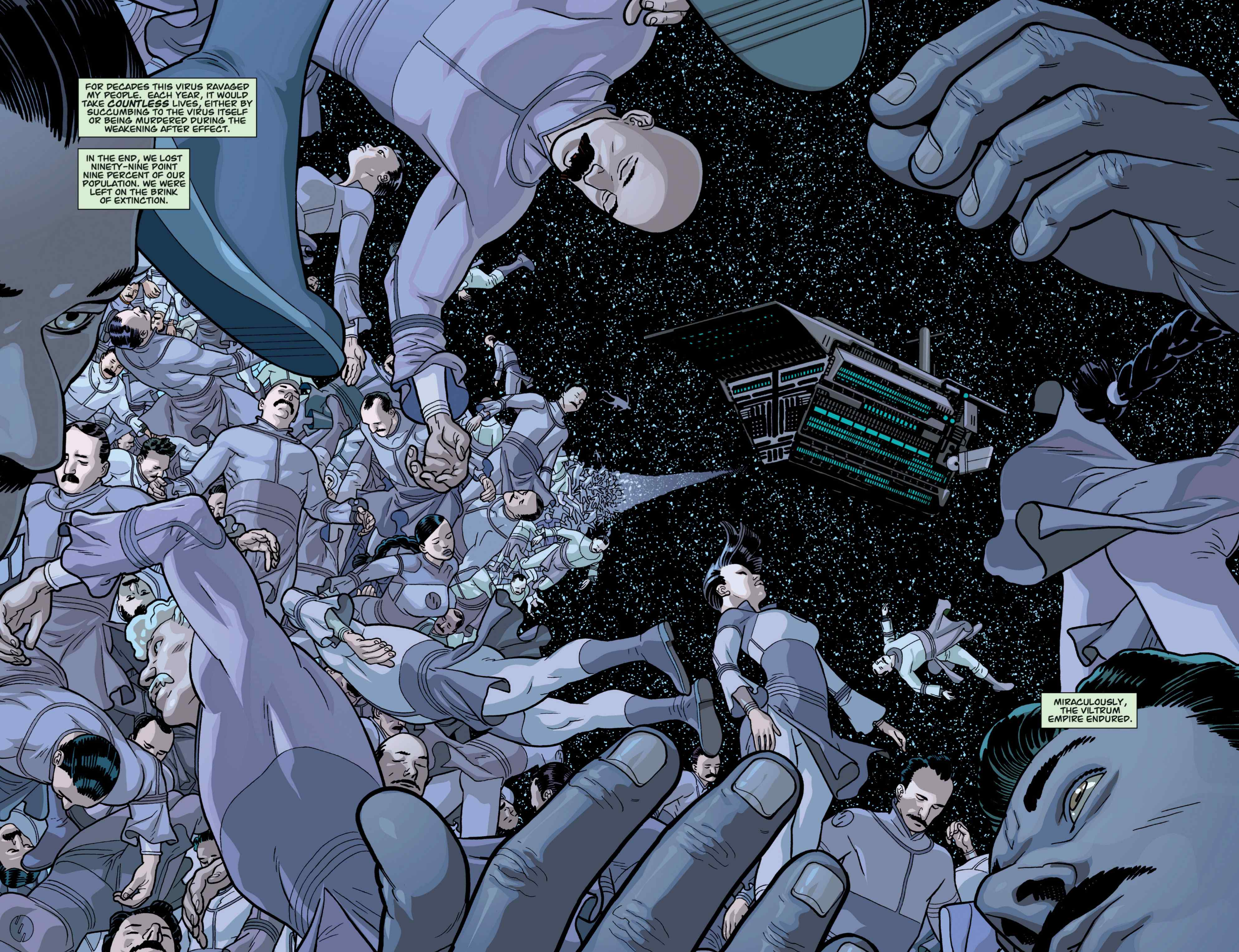


THOSE WHO SURVIVED THE VIRUS DISCOVERED ITS DEADLY AFTER EFFECTS.

THERE WAS A SHORT PERIOD OF TIME AFTER THE VIRUS HAD LEFT THEIR SYSTEM, WHERE THEIR STRENGTH AND INVULNERABILITY HAD BEEN GREATLY DIMINISHED.



THEY WERE THE LUCKY ONES.



FOR DECADES THIS VIRUS RAVAGED MY PEOPLE. EACH YEAR, IT WOULD TAKE *COUNTLESS* LIVES, EITHER BY SUCCUMBING TO THE VIRUS ITSELF OR BEING MURDERED DURING THE WEAKENING AFTER EFFECT.

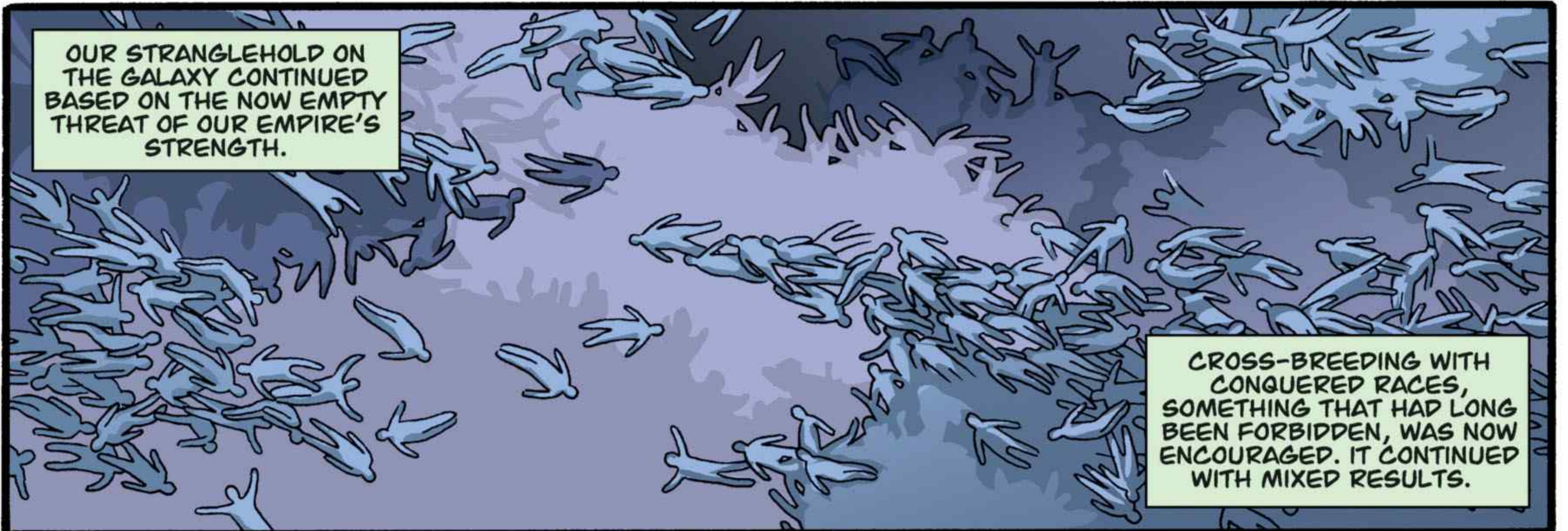
IN THE END, WE LOST NINETY-NINE POINT NINE PERCENT OF OUR POPULATION. WE WERE LEFT ON THE BRINK OF EXTINCTION.

MIRACULOUSLY, THE VILTRUM EMPIRE ENDURED.



OUR LEADERS SPREAD REPORTS OF OUR EXPANDING EMPIRE THINNING OUR RANKS. NEW PLANS WERE DEVISED ALLOWING AS FEW AS ONE VILTRUMITE TO CONQUER ALIEN PLANETS ON THEIR OWN.

MY MISSION ON EARTH WAS ONE SUCH PLAN.



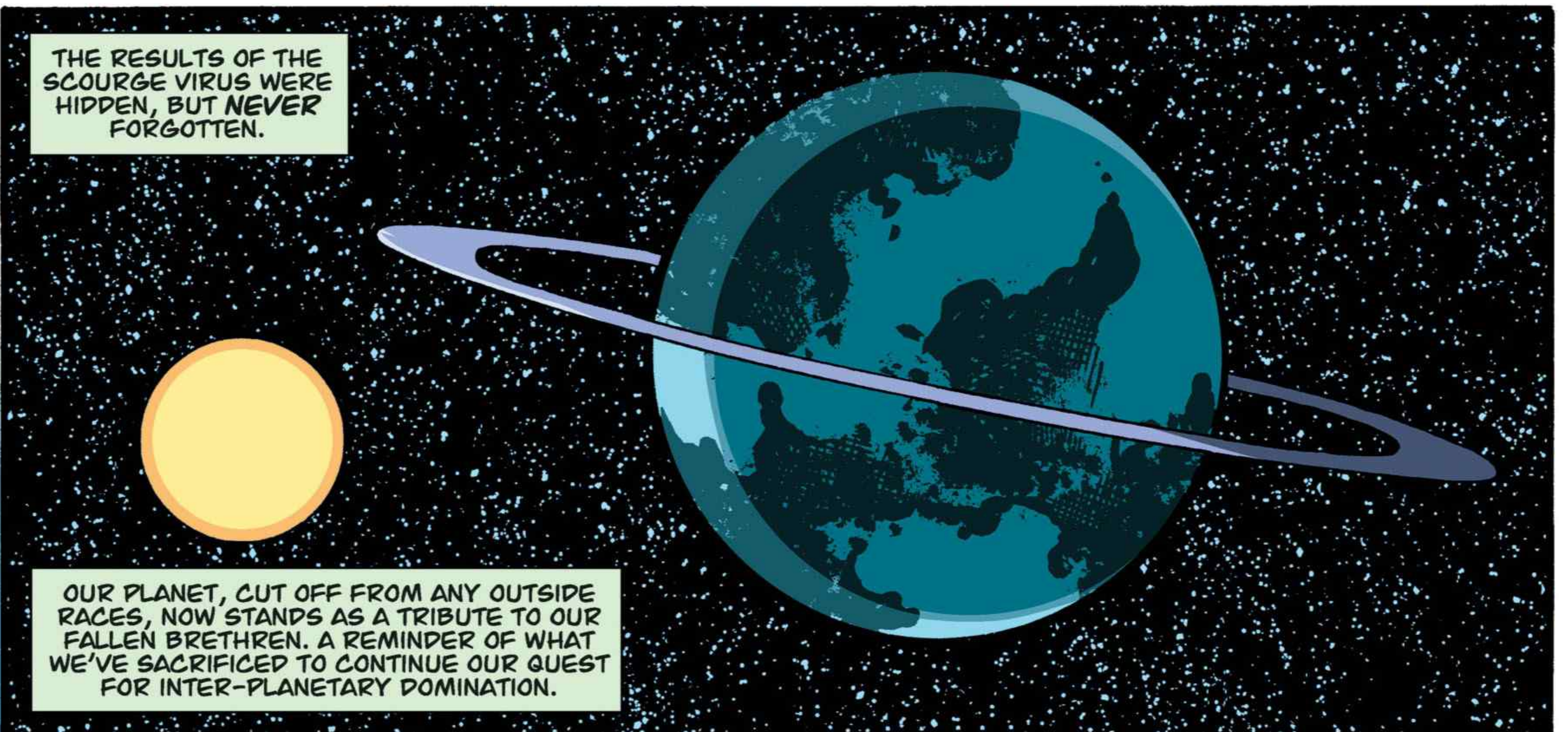
OUR STRANGLEHOLD ON THE GALAXY CONTINUED BASED ON THE NOW EMPTY THREAT OF OUR EMPIRE'S STRENGTH.

CROSS-BREEDING WITH CONQUERED RACES, SOMETHING THAT HAD LONG BEEN FORBIDDEN, WAS NOW ENCOURAGED. IT CONTINUED WITH MIXED RESULTS.



UNTIL EARTH, UNTIL MY SON. I NEVER TOLD HIM OUR MAIN REASON FOR CONQUERING EARTH... WHAT MADE IT SO IMPORTANT.

HUMAN DNA IS ALMOST ONE-HUNDRED PERCENT COMPATIBLE WITH VILTRUMITES. EARTH IS TO BECOME A BREEDING CAMP.



THE RESULTS OF THE SCOURGE VIRUS WERE HIDDEN, BUT NEVER FORGOTTEN.

OUR PLANET, CUT OFF FROM ANY OUTSIDE RACES, NOW STANDS AS A TRIBUTE TO OUR FALLEN BRETHREN. A REMINDER OF WHAT WE'VE SACRIFICED TO CONTINUE OUR QUEST FOR INTER-PLANETARY DOMINATION.



A QUEST I NOW SEE AS THE POINTLESS ENDEAVOR THAT IT IS...

WHAT THEY PLAN TO DO WITH EARTH... I WAS BORN IN A BREEDING CAMP. I WOULDN'T WISH THAT ON ANYONE. WE HAVE TO WARN MARK.



NO.

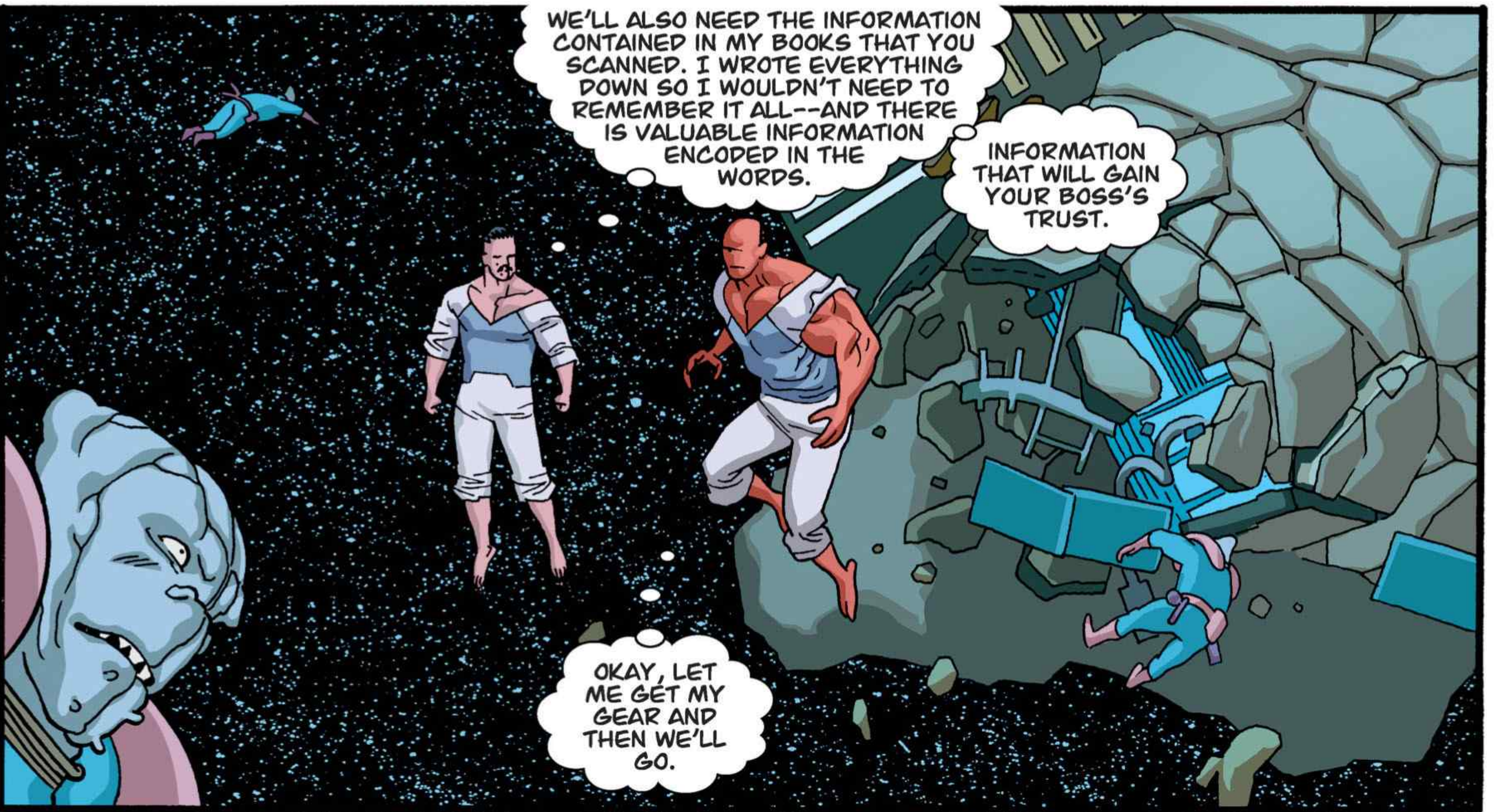
YOU HAVE TO TAKE ME TO YOUR PEOPLE. I NEED TO MEET WITH THE COALITION OF PLANETS. IMMEDIATELY.



I TRUST YOU, BUT I DON'T KNOW IF MY BOSS WILL. THIS WON'T BE EASY.



IT DOESN'T MATTER. IF WE'RE GOING TO BE ABLE TO SAVE EARTH AND STOP THE VILTRUM EMPIRE ONCE AND FOR ALL, THE COALITION NEEDS TO KNOW EVERYTHING I KNOW.



WE'LL ALSO NEED THE INFORMATION CONTAINED IN MY BOOKS THAT YOU SCANNED. I WROTE EVERYTHING DOWN SO I WOULDN'T NEED TO REMEMBER IT ALL--AND THERE IS VALUABLE INFORMATION ENCODED IN THE WORDS.

INFORMATION THAT WILL GAIN YOUR BOSS'S TRUST.

OKAY, LET ME GET MY GEAR AND THEN WE'LL GO.



SOME TIME LATER,
THE PLANET TELESCRIA,
THE SECRET HOME BASE
OF THE COALITION
OF PLANETS.



WHERE
HAVE YOU
BEEN?!



TELIA,
DEAR,
UH--I'M
SORRY.

I WAS ON
THAT MISSION
AND I WAS TAKEN
PRISONER BY THE
VILTRUMITES. THEY
HELD ME IN PRISON
FOR A FEW MONTHS,
I WAS JUST
RECENTLY ABLE
TO ESCAPE.

I WOULD
HAVE CONTACTED
YOU IF I COULD
HAVE--BUT THERE
WAS NEVER AN
OPPORTUNITY
AND--



NOT THAT--I KNOW
YOUR MISSIONS RUN
LONG SOMETIMES.
WHAT I'M TALKING
ABOUT IS THE
COUCH.

YOU
SLEPT
ON THE
COUCH!



OH, UH... THAT. I'M
SORRY. THE THING
IS, WE GOT IN
REALLY LATE
AND--



I DON'T CARE HOW LATE YOU GET BACK FROM A MISSION. YOU KNOW THE RULES. YOU WAKE ME UP!

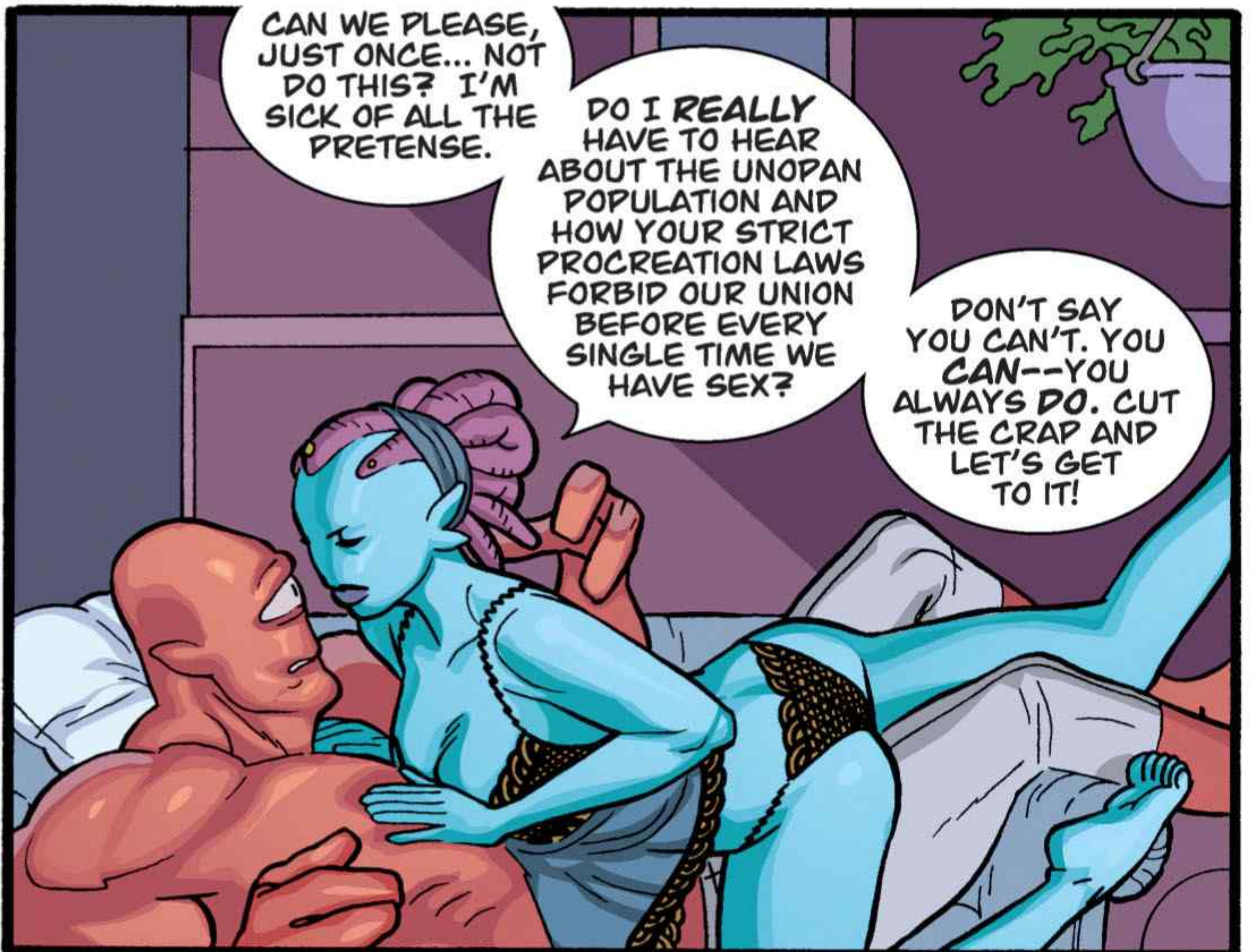
I'VE BEEN LIVING WITHOUT FOR MONTHS AND I AM HUNGRY! NOW GIVE IT TO ME, YOU UNOPAN GOD.

GIVE IT TO ME NOW!



TELIA, PLEASE. I CAN'T RIGHT NOW.

STOP--!



CAN WE PLEASE, JUST ONCE... NOT DO THIS? I'M SICK OF ALL THE PRETENSE.

DO I REALLY HAVE TO HEAR ABOUT THE UNOPAN POPULATION AND HOW YOUR STRICT PROCREATION LAWS FORBID OUR UNION BEFORE EVERY SINGLE TIME WE HAVE SEX?

DON'T SAY YOU CAN'T. YOU CAN--YOU ALWAYS DO. CUT THE CRAP AND LET'S GET TO IT!

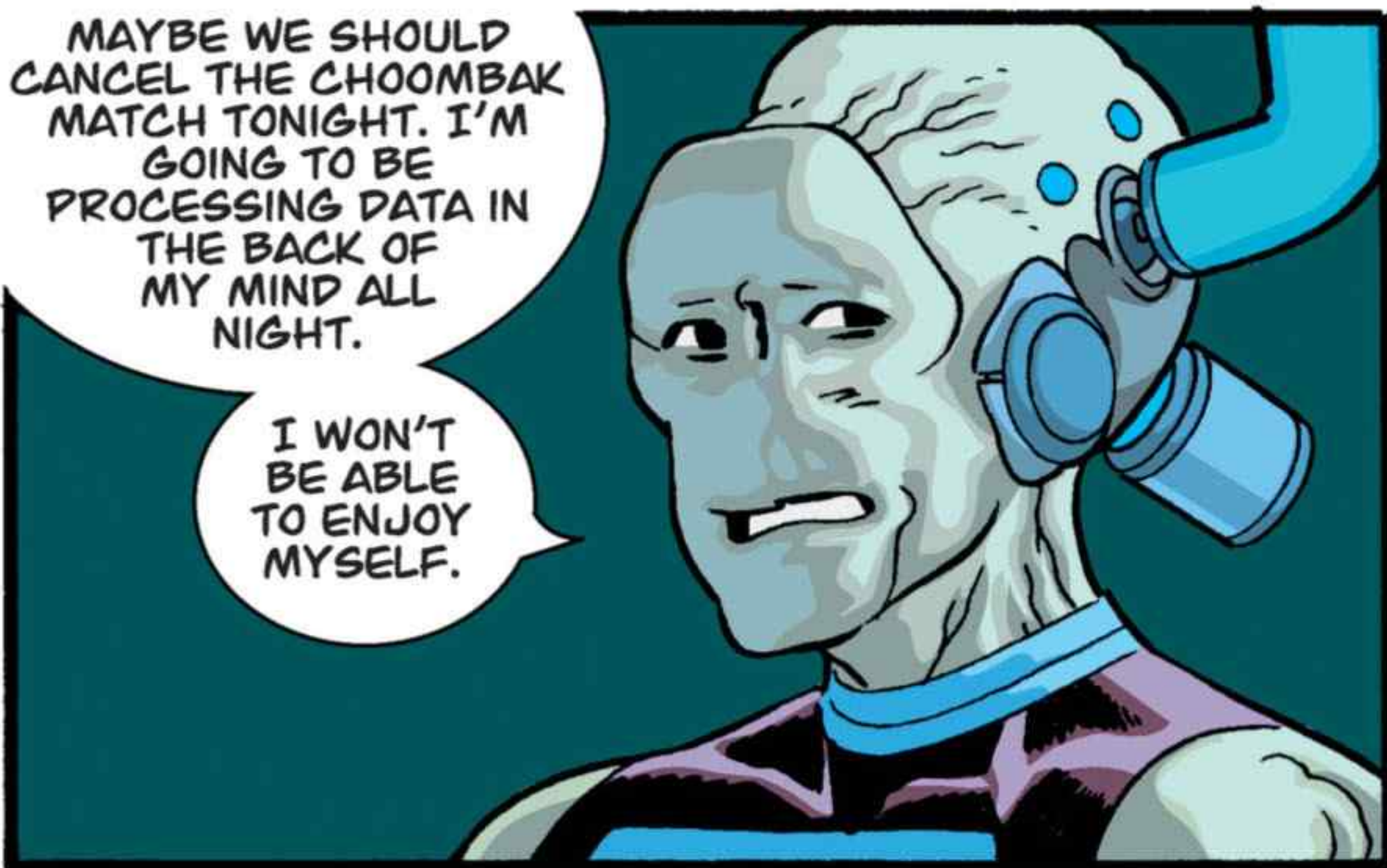
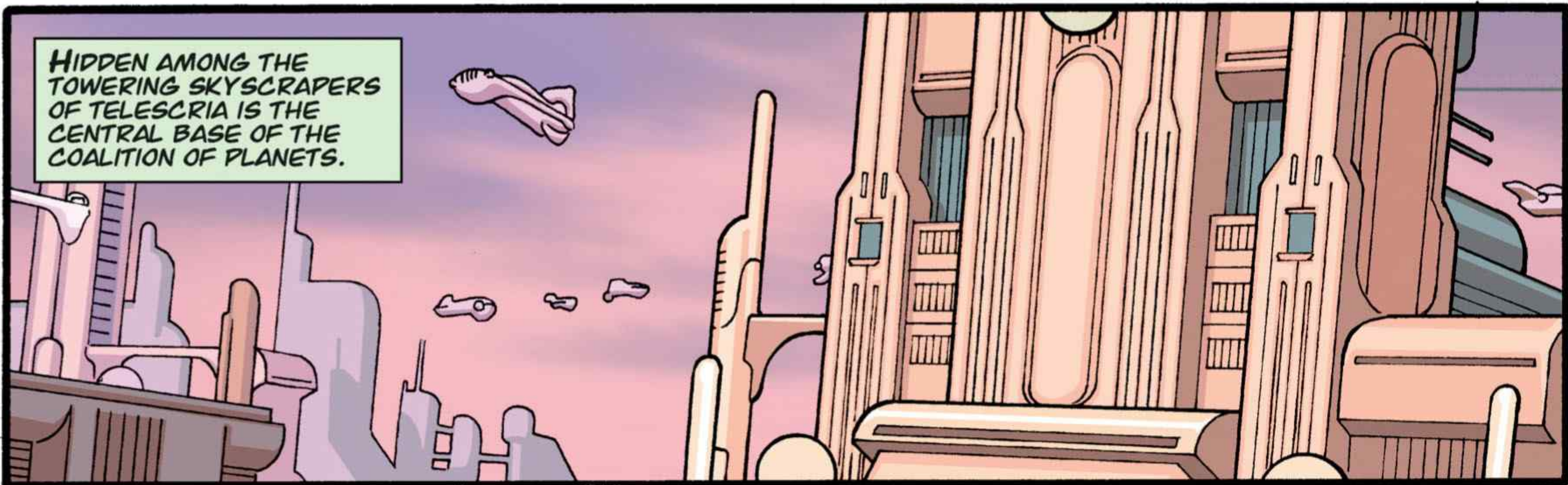


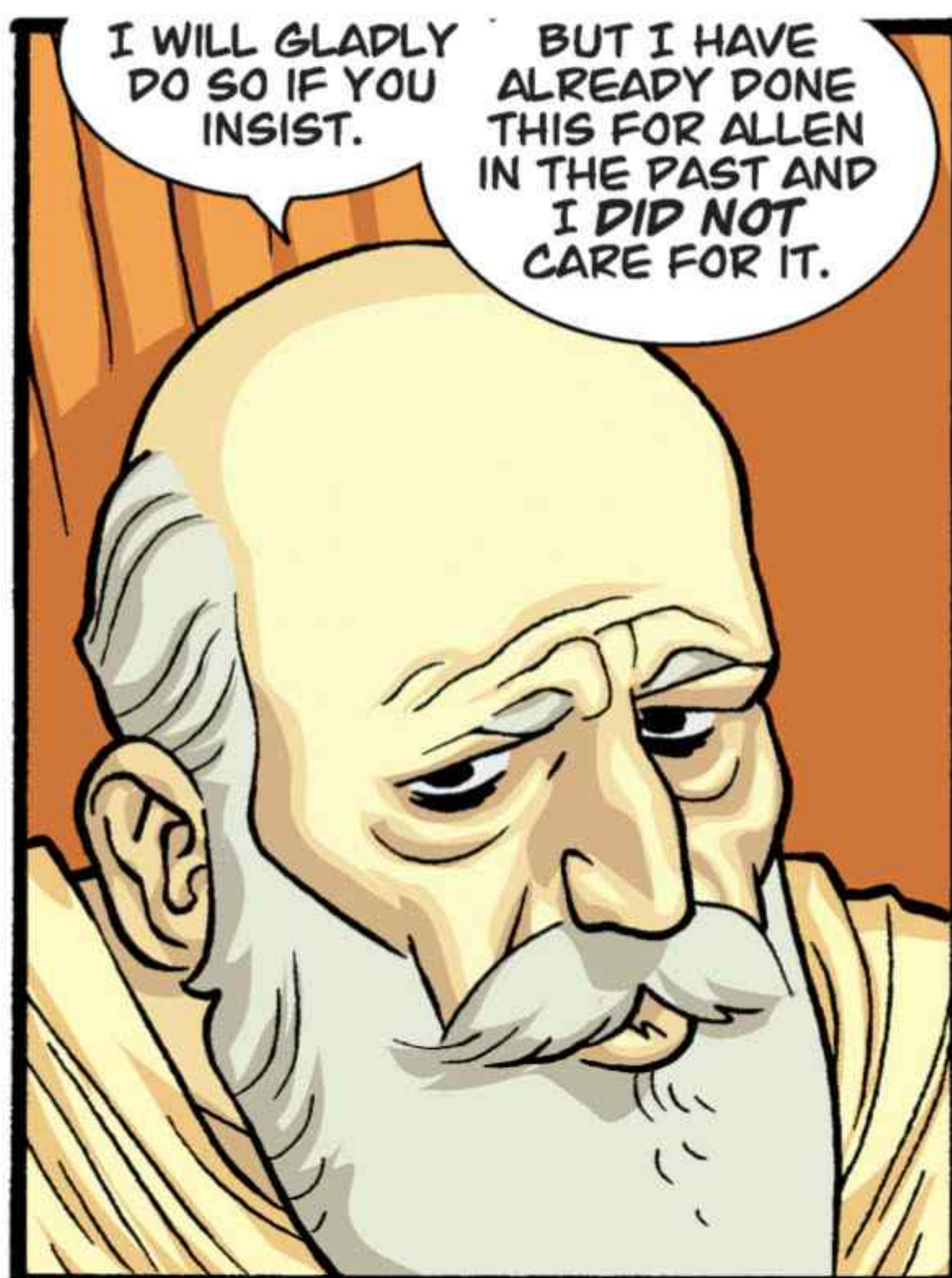
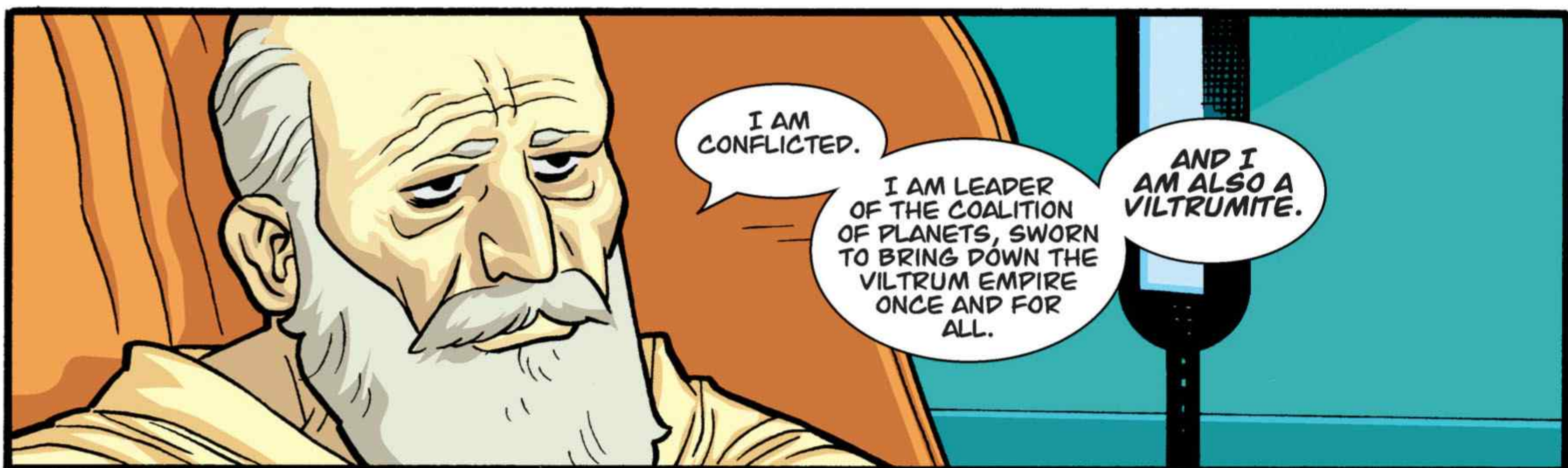
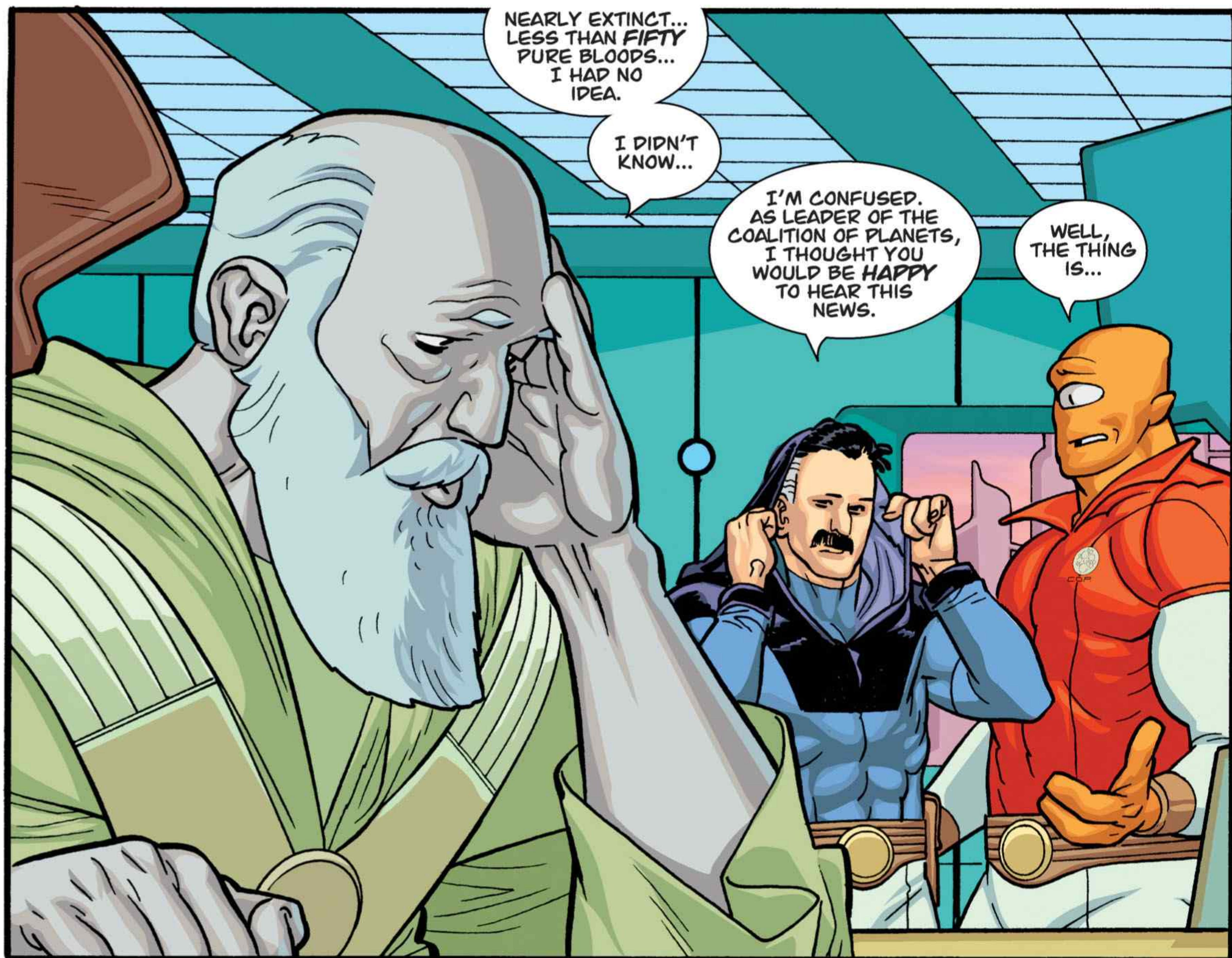
NO, THAT'S NOT IT--



WAIT A MINUTE... DID YOU SAY "WE" GOT IN REALLY LATE?









BUT I THOUGHT--I ALWAYS
FEARED THAT THERE WAS
SOMETHING WRONG WITH ME,
FOR TURNING MY BACK
AGAINST THE EMPIRE--
VILTRUMITES HAVE
ALWAYS BEEN
LOYAL...

...I
THOUGHT
I WAS THE
FIRST.

MY
BETRAYAL
WAS HIDDEN,
REMOVED FROM
HISTORY'S
RECORD.

BUT THERE
IS NO TIME FOR
THIS. WE HAVE
ALREADY BEEN
CONVERSING TOO
LONG. PEOPLE WILL
BECOME SUSPICIOUS
THAT THIS ISN'T
JUST A STANDARD
BRIEFING.

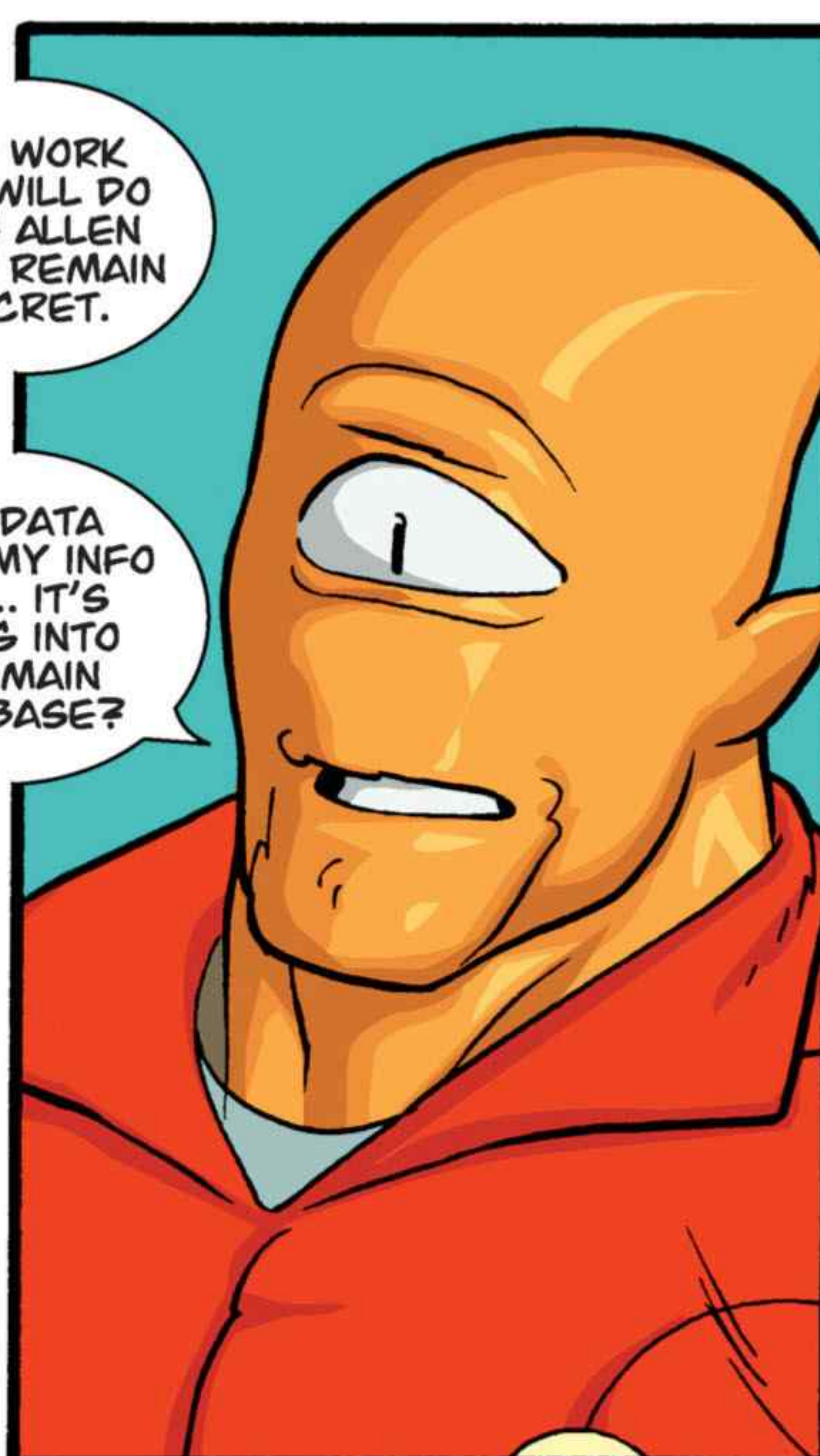
I
CAN'T
HAVE
THAT.



THERE IS AT LEAST ONE
VILTRUMITE AGENT AMONG
US, REPORTING BACK
TO THE EMPIRE.

THE WORK
YOU WILL DO
WITH ALLEN
MUST REMAIN
SECRET.

THE DATA
FROM MY INFO
POD... IT'S
GOING INTO
THE MAIN
DATABASE?



NO.

MY TRUSTED INNER-CIRCLE
HAS A SEPARATE DATABASE
FOR MORE SENSITIVE DATA.
AND EVEN THEY WILL BE
UNAWARE OF YOUR
MISSION USING THIS
DATA.



WE NOW HAVE A LIST OF
WEAPONS AND BEINGS THAT
CAN HURT A VILTRUMITE--
THINGS THAT WILL BECOME
VERY VALUABLE TO
THE COALITION OF
PLANETS.

I CHARGE
YOU TWO WITH
THE TASK OF
GATHERING AS
MUCH OF THESE
THINGS THAT
STILL
REMAIN.

ALLEN, I'M GIVING
YOU ACCESS TO OUR
ARMORY FOR THE NEXT
HOUR--THAT'S AS MUCH
TIME AS I CAN KEEP
SECRET FROM THE
COUNCIL.

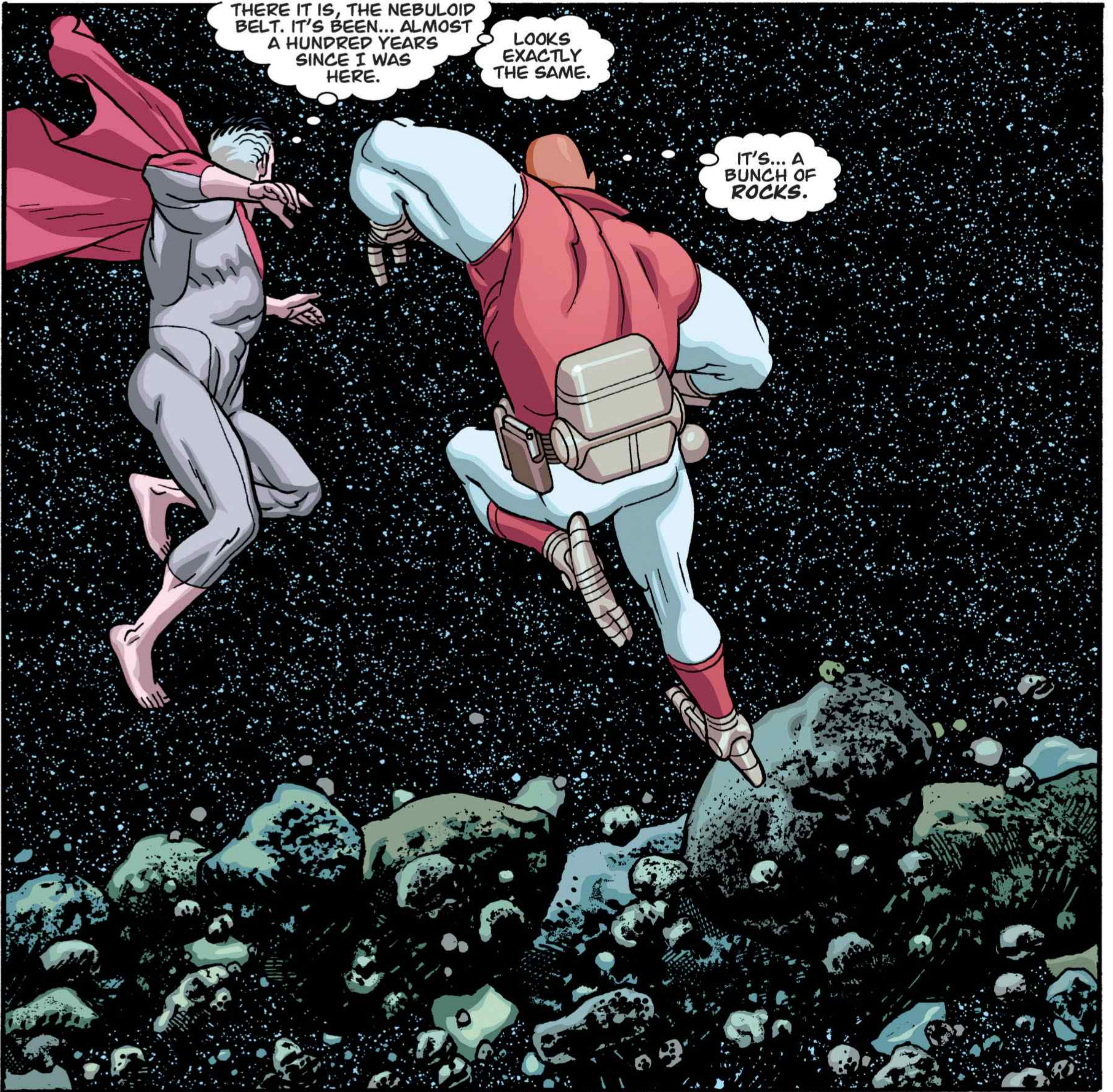
GO.

SWEET!

IT LOOKS COOL, BUT WITH YOUR STRENGTH AREN'T ALL THOSE GADGETS A LITTLE... UNNECESSARY? SEEMS LIKE THEY'LL JUST... SLOW YOU DOWN.

YEAH, AND YOUR SUIT'S ALL ABOUT PRACTICALITY. NICE CAPE, DUDE.





THERE IT IS, THE NEBULOID BELT. IT'S BEEN... ALMOST A HUNDRED YEARS SINCE I WAS HERE.

LOOKS EXACTLY THE SAME.

IT'S... A BUNCH OF ROCKS.



HAND ME YOUR INFO POD.



JUST SAYING...



THERE'S A CODE HIDDEN IN THE TEXT. THE NUMBER OF WORDS IN THESE PARAGRAPHS I WROTE ABOUT THE ASTEROIDS WILL SPELL OUT THE COORDINATES OF THE SPECIFIC ASTEROID WE'RE LOOKING FOR.

FOLLOW ME.

SO, IF IT'S BEEN ONE-HUNDRED YEARS, GIVE OR TAKE, AND THE ASTEROIDS ARE DRIFTING AT THIS SPEED, THEIR RELATIVE DISTANCE TO EACH OTHER WOULD BE SHIFTING...

AND...

YOU GOING TO BE ABLE TO FIND THIS... WHATEVER IT IS WE'RE AFTER?

ABSOLUTELY. JUST GIVE ME A MINUTE.

...
ANYTHING I CAN DO TO HELP?

NO, NO... ALMOST GOT IT.

THERE.

THIS IS IT.

HOW CAN YOU BE SURE? IT'S A ROCK-- THEY ALL LOOK THE SAME.

I'M NOT SURE... BUT THIS LOOKS FAMILIAR.

AH!



THERE IT IS.

WAIT, WHAT?

I DON'T UNDERSTAND. THE GUN HAS JUST BEEN LYING HERE FOR ALMOST ONE-HUNDRED YEARS? THAT MAKES NO SENSE.

WHY DIDN'T YOU JUST TAKE IT BACK TO THE VILTRUM EMPIRE? WHY'D YOU LEAVE IT HERE?

THIS GUN BELONGS TO THE SPACE RACER. YOU REALLY KNOW NOTHING ABOUT HIM?



SPACE RACER? YOU CALLED HIM THE SPACE RIDER IN THE BOOK.

I HAD TO CHANGE THE NAMES, I HAD NO IDEA WHO WOULD EVENTUALLY READ THOSE BOOKS. I WROTE THEM AS REMINDERS TO MYSELF--OR MY SON, IF WE NEEDED THEM. I DIDN'T WANT THEM TO FALL INTO THE WRONG HANDS.

AND NO, I'M NOT EVEN CLOSE TO ONE-HUNDRED YEARS OLD. YOU DID YOUR JOB, NO ONE TALKS ABOUT THIS GUY ANYMORE.



THE SPACE RACER'S GUN--THE ONE THAT FIRES INDESTRUCTIBLE BLASTS THAT WILL SHOOT THROUGH ANYTHING--CAN ONLY BE FIRED BY HIM.

HE'S GOT SOME KIND OF BOND WITH THE GUN--IF ANYONE TRIES TO TAKE IT OR USE IT... IF I HAD TOUCHED IT WHILE HE WAS STILL ALIVE IT WOULD HAVE FLOWN INTO THE CENTER OF THE PILE OF RUBBLE I BURIED HIM UNDER AND GIVEN HIM THE MEANS TO ESCAPE.

MY ONLY OPTION WAS TO LEAVE IT EXACTLY WHERE HE DROPPED IT.







NOLAN OF
VILTRUM--
GIVE ME ONE
REASON NOT
TO KILL YOU
WHERE YOU
STAND.



UH...

BOY, THIS
GUY SURE
CAN GO A LONG
TIME WITHOUT
EATING.